

VZCZCXRO9755
PP RUEHDBU RUEHPW RUEHSL
DE RUEHBUL #2830/01 2620608
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 190608Z SEP 09
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1521
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 002830

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/16/2019

TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: KABUL ELECTIONS: WHAT DO ORDINARY AFGHANS THINK?

REF: KABUL 2765

Classified By: Acting PolCouns Victoria Alvarado for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Despite high-level consternation among Afghan and international circles, informal polling of ordinary Afghans indicates an apparent higher level of satisfaction with the recent presidential election. Afghans polled through PRTs uniformly expressed pride in what they see as a generally successful, open election. Some Afghans complained of fraud, others downplayed it, while still others voiced concern over the uncertainty of a possible run-off, saying that many braved Taliban threats in order to vote. All hoped it would not be necessary to endure similar threats to personal safety if a run-off were required. END SUMMARY.

Fraud Dominates Discourse at the Top

¶2. (C) On September 10, the Director of the Free and Fair Elections in Afghanistan (FEFA) Nader Nadery told us that the uncertainty regarding how to successfully conclude the presidential election vote count has caused a pervading sense of anxiety to settle over the electorate. He said most Afghans are willing to wait to permit the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) to investigate claims of fraud committed during the elections, but their patience wouldn't last more than a few weeks. The FEFA director said it was important for the ECC to press the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to investigate the many reported claims of fraud committed by both Karzai and Abdullah supporters. He said irrespective who is ultimately declared the winner, it was essential for Afghan society to see, through this process, that it was possible in a democratic society to resolve a contested election according to the rule of law and not through violence.

¶3. (U) On September 9, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) expressed concern over the number of fraud complaints filed with election authorities. According to NDI's statement, "The credibility of Afghanistan's elections now depends largely on the thorough investigation of these complaints by the ECC." NDI's hard line on the existence of election fraud was also expressed in the following statement, "Unless the 'clear and convincing evidence of fraud' found by the ECC is addressed, it will be impossible to determine the will of the Afghan people."

¶4. (U) We had an understanding of what Afghan elites were saying about the elections based on meetings with interlocutors, political figures, and media reports. However, our grasp of how Afghans in more ordinary circumstances living in the provinces viewed the election was lacking, so we asked our PRTs to informally poll Afghans, asking the following questions:

- Do you understand the election process? Can you explain it?
- Did the elections process meet your expectations?

- How do you think it will turn out?

The answers suggest that ordinary Afghans were gratified that Afghanistan pulled off what they generally saw as an open, violence-free election. Snapshots of their opinions follow.

Beyond Kabul, Folks Just Happy They Could Vote

15. (U) PRT Herat reports that in a meeting for the ANSF and local media a senior provincial government official expressed glee over the news that Karzai had won the election. PRTOff cautioned the official that the ECC had ordered a recount of many polling stations' votes and vote results were not official until this process played out. PRTOff believes that the official's ignorance of the post-election process is widespread. Separately, Herat PRTOff discussed elections with Herati artists and reported they seemed to care little about the elections, preferring instead to talk about art and the economic situation in Herat. A second group of voters surveyed said the media effectively informed the public about election day procedures and although some cited fraud concerns the prevailing sentiment was satisfaction that they had been given the opportunity to vote in a an open election.

16. (U) PRT Kunduz reported that ordinary Afghans seem to be fairly aware of the ongoing election stalemate and have a fair understanding of how the post-election process should play out. Kunduz Afghans understand that the ECC is separate from the IEC and distrust the latter due to a belief that the

KABUL 00002830 002 OF 002

IEC is unduly influenced by Karzai. PRT Kunduz also reported that Afghans there feel the will of the United States will also heavily influence the outcome.

17. (U) Afghan voters surveyed in Nuristan were more evenly divided in their feelings. A teacher said that Karzai would bring stability through a policy of talking to the Taliban. Other voters echoed this sentiment. However, other Nuristani voters voiced disappointment with instances of candidates stuffing ballot boxes. One teacher said "We can't say it was a clean and clear election. People did not vote for candidates, but candidates instead filled the ballot boxes with their own forged votes".

Some Voted More Than Others

18. (U) A sampling of opinions from PRT Laghman shows confidence in the elections. An Afghan soldier said the election went well. He added, "It is why I like the process of election, it was free and everyone had the right to vote." A storekeeper agreed it was a good election and said all Afghans participated and elected their future president. A local religious leader concurred that local support for Karzai was high and expressed concern at the prospect of a runoff election saying, "We do not want a runoff election, it is a threat to security." PRT Laghman FSN staff also expressed enthusiasm for the election and said "Everybody voted for his favorite candidate and we are very happy to have had such a free election after 30 years of war". Media reports similar enthusiasm for the electoral process among Kabul voters while highlighting a darker side of the elections. A merchant in Kabul said he voted for Karzai and did so three times. He said, "In my village I saw people who voted 10 times each. Why should I vote only once?"

Comment

19. (U) From this small sample, one could surmise that there

is general satisfaction among ordinary Afghans that the country successfully concluded a presidential election. However, this is merely a small snapshot of what could be a different larger picture. Further, public opinion could shift once the official election results are released. Nonetheless, this brief glimpse does suggest that the relevance of charges of electoral fraud may be tied to the socio-economic status of Afghans. Among the elites the issue of fraud is paramount and dominates all political discourse. At the other end of the spectrum, we found less concern over the implications of fraud, and instead, a pervading "We did it!" attitude.

EIKENBERRY